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ABSTRACT

When it is necessary for a person to be personally escorted to an agency if he is ever going to get there, the center should consider the use of volunteers for this service. One possible source of volunteer help might be the volunteers who participated in the center's community resources survey. Another source would be organizations that provide volunteer service for older people as part of their ongoing programs. A minimum of five volunteers should be used on a rotating basis in order to make allowances for the volunteer's own schedule as well as illness and family priorities. The matter of reimbursement to the volunteer for mileage and parking expenses should be worked out individually with each volunteer. The information and referral center should keep a file on volunteer escorts including the volunteer's insurance agent, insurance company, address and phone number. All volunteers should be oriented to the service he is to provide and for the responsibility he is to assume. A volunteer escort service may be a crucial factor in helping the center fulfill its mission of linking people to the services they need. (Other manuals in this series are available as LI 003187-003192 and LI 003194-003195). (Author/NH)

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Information and Referral Services:

VOLUNTEER ESCORT SERVICE

(Working Draft)

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Project Director
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Chapter 1: Escort Service - Why and When

In some instances it may be necessary for a person to be personally escorted to an agency if he is ever going to get there. He may be physically unable to use public transportation or, in some cases, may not have the money. It is also possible that public transportation may not be available to him. In still other cases, he may be too fearful or uncertain to go by himself. The person's need for escort service should evidence itself during the referral or follow-up process.

The need for escort service may not arise often. When it does, however, you should be prepared to offer it. There may be little or no problem when you are referring the person to an agency that provides an outreach service that takes into account the difficulties people may have in getting to services in the community. Then all you have to do is call the agency, notify the contact person that Mr. B. needs his agency's services, and request that a home visit or telephone call be made to him. The resource file will identify those agencies that provide outreach as one of their services. Even when outreach is not listed as one of an agency's services, a worker or an agency may be willing to make a home visit if requested to do so. In other words, it does not hurt to ask.

Chapter 2: Recruiting Volunteers for Escort Service

For those agencies which do not provide outreach service, however, a center escort service will be valuable. Unless your budget is exceptional, you will probably not be able to afford a paid escort staff and may wish to consider the use of volunteers. One possible source of volunteer help might be the volunteers who may have participated in the community resources survey. They would be familiar with the center and its purposes, and might enjoy helping you again if you called them.

If not, check the resource file for the names of organizations that provide volunteer service for older people as part of their ongoing programs. Organizations providing transportation service in particular will be of special importance. Call the presidents or chairmen of these organizations, introduce yourself, and explain the nature of the request, i.e., the need for escort service for older people, in relation to the center's mission. If the resource file does not yield enough information about the volunteer service programs of these organizations, call their presidents and chairmen anyway to see if an interest in providing such a service can be developed.

Chapter 3: How the Volunteer Escort Service Should Work

It should be possible to secure the names and phone numbers of about five volunteers to use on a rotating basis. The exact number of volunteers needed at any one time, however, will depend on the nature of the inquiries and problems presented at the center and their frequency. Experience will be a valuable guide. Although five names may seem too many at the beginning, it is important to make allowances for the volunteer's own schedule as well as illness and family priorities. Try to alert each volunteer sufficiently ahead of time so that he can arrange his schedule to accomodate the center. Some volunteers may need no more than a day's notice; others may need several days. In any case, this should be worked out individually with each volunteer. In the event that a volunteer is not available when you call, try to arrange to have him provide his or her own substitute. If this is not possible, be ready to use the other names on your list.

Each volunteer should contact the older person directly to make whatever arrangements are necessary regarding time and place for meeting. The volunteer will need the name, address, and phone number of the older person, as well as the name and address of the agency to which he has been referred.

Make sure that each volunteer understands what is expected of him and its importance, in order to minimize disappointments and frustrations on the part of the volunteer, the older person, and the center.

Chapter 4: Reimbursement for Expenses

Some volunteer escorts may need to be reimbursed for mileage and parking expenses if they provide automobile transportation. Inquire of other agencies about the going rate for mileage in your community. Have these volunteers complete an expense form which should be turned in to you at the end of each month. Other volunteers may not need to be reimbursed for these expenses and would be offended if they were. If some volumteers wish to contribute their mileage and parking expenses, remind them that these items are deductible for income tax purposes. If they do a lot of escorting, these expenses could add up to quite a sum, and this kind of consideration could be quite welcome. The matter of reimbursement should be worked out individually with each volunteer.

Chapter 5: The Matter of Insurance

All volunteers must be properly insured for driving to be an escort. The volunteer's usual automobile coverage is sufficient to insure both him and the person he is escorting against injury resulting from an accident while the service is being provided. A card file should be kept in the I & R office for each volunteer escort and should contain the name of the volunteer's insurance agent, insurance company, address, and phone number. In case of an accident, the volunteer's insurance agent should be notified immediately.

Chapter 6: Thank You's

Again, periodic notes or expressions of thanks, sincerely given, and/or a public listing of those who have given service are always welcomedand appreciated. These are often the only rewards that volunteers receive. It is essential that this kind of recognition be provided, not only in consideration for the feelings of the volunteers, but also in consideration for those older people who need to rely on volunteers for linkage to the services they need. Without volunteers, it is unlikely that the center could provide an escort service. There simply would not be time or manpower to do it.

Chapter 7: A Word About Escorting the Physically Disabled

All volunteer escorts should be prepared to offer a steadying hand or arm to the older person. However, for those older persons who are physically disabled and require substantial physical help or special equipment, services such as handicabs or Red Cross should be used for transportation purposes, with the volunteer accompanying the person in the cab. It should be remembered that escort service is not just a transportation service. It is what its name implies--a one-time companion service for those older people who are unable to obtain service provisions they need and to which they are entitled without the aid of an escort.

Chapter 8 : Orientation Meeting for Volunteer Escorts

Before any volunteer is given an escort assignment, he should be oriented to the service he is about to provide and for the responsibility he is about to assume. It is not enough to assign him to the task without putting it into a meaningful context for him, particularly if you would like to develop a corps of volunteers who are truly committed to the center. Arrange an orientation meeting at a time when most of your volunteer recruits can be there. It probably should take no more than two hours if you plan the agenda well. It should include the following:

. history and background of the center

. purpose and function of center

. services for older people

. why older people need services

. why some older people need escort services

. how the escort service will work

As in all meetings, allow time for questions and discussion. Then schedule one or two follow-up meetings to see how things are going; otherwise, keep in touch by phone. If you can, include some sociability into the meetings by serving refreshments. Many good friendships are developed through meetings such as these. These are the by-products of volunteer service which you may want to note.

Chapter 9: Chairman or Coordinator of Volunteer Escort Service

Once you get a sense of the demand or need for escort service, you may want to think about having someone coordinate the service for you, particularly if the demand is great. Consider asking one of your most dependable volunteers to do this, one who enjoys organizing, working with people, and making arrangements. He should be responsible for matching each request with an assigned volunteer and also for recruiting new volunteers to the service when the ranks get thin. He also might arrange for and handle the orientation meeting for you. Chairmen should be rotated periodically to avoid having the responsibility become burdensome and also to increase volunteer interest and involvement in the service. Until you know what the demand for escort service is, though, you probably will want to handle this assignment yourself. In any event, volunteer escort service may be a crucial factor in helping the center fulfill its mission of linking people to the services they need.